

To: Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Paul Ryan

From: Newt Gingrich

CC: Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi

Date: December 21, 2018

Subject: September 2016 Briefings to House Leadership and the House Administration Committee Regarding the IT Allegations Involving Imran Awan and his associates

Dear Mr. Speaker:

As a former Speaker of the House and a concerned private citizen, the allegations surrounding crimes committed by former House IT employees and the potential cover-up of and negligence toward addressing such crimes, is profoundly disturbing.

On November 16, 2018, I sent a letter to House Inspector General Michael Ptasienski requesting the public release of two 2016 briefings given by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to House leadership that outlined the alleged crimes committed by a former House IT employee, Imran Awan, and his associates.

As I noted in my letter, these presentations given on September 20, 2016 and September 30, 2016, “provide critical information pertaining to the possible invoice manipulation, equipment theft, illicit cyber activities, irregular cyber-related login and usage patterns, and outside storage of House data by Imran Awan and his associates.”

On December 12, 2018, I received a response from General Counsel Thomas Hungar who denied my request. Mr. Hungar instead argued that my concerns “may have been prompted by the extensive misinformation published about this matter in the media.” Based on his own “extensive exposure to substantial quantities of evidence,” he concluded that he is “confident” that no cover-up occurred and that the conclusions contained in the July 2018 plea agreement are “justifiable and fair”.

However, Mr. Speaker, I encourage you to examine the following facts – which have led me to question the thoroughness of the investigation and the accuracy of the conclusions that have been derived – and release all documents associated with the September 2016 briefings.

The Department of Justice wrote in the July 2018 plea agreement that throughout the investigation, approximately 40 witnesses were interviewed. However, this number appears to be substantially inadequate when you consider that the Awan associates were employed by the House as shared IT employees for 13 years and worked for more than 60 members during this time period. Additionally, the Awan associates were listed on the payrolls of approximately 40 members each year in 2015, 2016, and 2017. Consider the members themselves, House member staff, fellow IT colleagues and peers, and additional business associates; in doing so, it becomes

clear that interviewing only 40 witnesses in an investigation of this magnitude and seriousness is nowhere near sufficient.

It has also been reported that key witnesses connected to this investigation were contacted just days or hours before the plea agreement was signed in July, and a witness was prohibited from bringing relevant documents to an interview with the FBI. Evidently, conducting interviews in this way suggests that the FBI investigators wanted to be able to point to an assortment of witnesses that they contacted, when in reality, it raises questions of the legitimacy of these interviews and whether they were truly conducted in good faith.

Further, the alleged activities of the Awan associates during their time in House employment had the capacity to cause significant financial and equipment losses – and pose substantial and continual threats to national security.

In one office, \$120,000 of missing equipment was written off of the House inventory after an Awan associate employed by the office failed to produce the items in question. An unofficial transcript of the OIG briefing on September 20, 2016 asserted that the “shared employee stated that the items were never received, shouldn’t have been inventoried, or the staff lost the equipment.” The transcribed statement that follows shows that this claim is logistically impossible, as “equipment could not be on the inventory or have [an] asset tag unless it had arrive[d] in [the] office and [the] EIN had been signed.”

In addition to the alleged equipment theft, according to the unofficial transcription, there were multiple cases of invoice manipulation by the Awan associates. The unofficial transcription states, “as of Sept. 1, 2016 there have been 34 purchases...totaling nearly \$38,000 where the cost of the item was manipulated.”

It is equally important to recognize the members of the House to which the Awan associates had access. Members on the Committee of Foreign Affairs paid the Awan associates more than \$950,000. The Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence issued payments totaling more than \$530,000, and the Committee on the Judiciary paid the associates more than \$446,000. More than \$221,000 was paid to the Awan associates by the Committee on Ethics, and upwards of \$175,000 was paid by the Committee on Homeland Security.

Concerningly, the unofficial transcript of the September 2016 briefings notes the computerized “unauthorized access” of the Awan associates and that the “pattern[s] of login activity suggests steps are being taken to conceal their activity.” The unofficial transcript warns that the associated “risks may be higher since the shared employees [the Awan associates] have not been vetted (e.g. background check).”

The Awan associates’ close ties with Pakistan have also been identified. Namely, these ties include immense amounts of owned property that were not correctly disclosed in House documents. Additionally, in early 2017, a home equity line of credit loan totaling \$165,000 was wired in its entirety to two people in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Imran Awan pleaded guilty to receiving this exact loan using illegal means.

The unofficial transcript of the briefings lastly notes that there was “[p]ossible storage of sensitive House information outside the House,” using the file sharing site Dropbox, and categorizes such file sharing sites as “a classic method for insiders to exfiltrate data from an organization.” The transcript notes that this had not been confirmed, as at the time “[The OIG had] not been permitted to view content of the files on [the] workstations. However, based on the file names, some of the information is likely sensitive.”

Taken into account the totality of the aforementioned information, I implore you to put aside bias and politics, critically examine the foregoing facts, and remember the duty that the United States Congress has to the American people.

It is imperative that government leaders stand for honesty, accountability, and transparency in their actions.

A 2015 press release from your office recounting your first Capitol press briefing as Speaker noted that you “shared [your] vision for a House of Representatives that is more open, inclusive, and transparent,” in your remarks.

Similarly, Speaker-Designate Nancy Pelosi said after the Democrats won the House on November 6 “Congress will be led with transparency and openness, so that the public can see what’s happening and how it affects them ... We will have accountability and we will strive for bipartisanship, with fairness on all sides.”

The secrecy under which the allegations and the subsequent inadequate investigation were kept is a betrayal of the trust of the American people. Americans have a fundamental right to know what happened, who is responsible, what has been done to ensure the fair and transparent administration of justice, and what actions have been taken to prevent the reoccurrence of these alleged crimes in one of our most revered government institutions.

As I wrote in November, “The American people expect better than this. The United States Congress should be better than this.”

Therefore, releasing the requested documents will be a critical step in furthering this collective vision of transparency and openness and will reassure the American people that every government official and member of Congress will be held accountable for his or her actions.

Americans have a right to truthful answers to the questions surrounding these concerning allegations, and they deserve to be able to trust that their elected officials are acting in their best interest.

Sincerely,

Newt Gingrich
Former U.S. Speaker of the House of Representatives